

Zimbabwe nurses' and teachers' strikes continue; National auto strike in South Africa; First national strike by doctors in Spain for 25 years

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Africa

Nurses in Zimbabwe continue strike despite government threats and isolation by unions

Nurses in Zimbabwe who have been on strike for four months for personal protective equipment (PPE) and a living wage are being threatened with the sack.

The ZANU-PF government led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa wants to end the dispute, already isolated by the unions, under the guise of "raising standards" and "improving efficiency." Earlier this month the Zimbabwe Nurses Association, the largest nurses' union, encouraged its 16,000 members to return to work "if there is PPE." Doctors had previously joined the stoppage.

The government declared striking nurses "will be relieved of their duties." Those willing to end their strike will be forced to "re-apply [for their jobs] and they will be admitted as contract workers."

Nurses have resorted to wearing bin bags as PPE. They are demanding to be paid in US dollars as inflation is raging around 800 percent and they cannot afford to travel to work.

Zimbabwe has 8,320 coronavirus cases and 242 deaths. This is doubtless an underestimate, with public health in collapse.

Zimbabwe teachers' stoppage continues while unions prepare betrayal with letter to Mnangagwa

The Zimbabwe teachers' strike, begun in the autumn term, continues, despite signs that unions are preparing a betrayal. The strike against poverty wages is part of growing international opposition to governments' homicidal drive to reopen schools before the coronavirus is suppressed, to reopen the economy to profit making.

The unions deny their members are on strike, insisting teachers are economically "incapacitated," to suppress militancy and cravenly appeal to the government.

The Zimbabwe Teachers' Association, Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe and other unions have now written a fawning letter to "Your Excellency" President Emmerson Mnangagwa, calling him "a listening President" who will "accommodate the teachers and come to their rescue."

Mnangagwa came to power following the death of long-time dictator Robert Mugabe and is overseeing brutal attacks on public sector workers. Runaway inflation means teachers' salaries do not cover bills or the basics of life.

In their letter, the unions say they "want to plead with" Mnangagwa "to intervene." They call on the man responsible for their members' poverty to "capacitate teachers so that they can report for duty." This is a clear pledge to end the strike and get teachers back to work.

Auto workers in South Africa begin stoppage for wage increases

South Africa's auto workers began a national strike Tuesday against employers in the Retail Motor Industry (RMI), demanding a previously agreed eight percent pay rise. The rise was expected in September.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members marched to the offices of the RMI, the Motor Industry Bargaining Council (MIBCO) and the Department of Labour to hand over petitions.

NUMSA represents 25 percent of workers in the industry. The government body MIBCO is a buffer between workers and employers to "to create and maintain industrial peace and stability in the motor industry."

Before the pandemic, the government planned to double auto production, aiming at an annual output of 1.4 million vehicles by 2035, and to increase the proportion of auto parts produced locally from 39 to 60 percent. Firms including BMW, Ford, General Motors, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen produce 600,000 vehicles annually in South Africa, exporting 65 percent.

Public sector workers in South Africa strike for pay increase

Over 100 South African workers at the Pretoria-based state-owned vaccine manufacturer, Onderstepoort Biological Products, walked out October 19. They picketed the company offices demanding their nine percent annual salary increment, after negotiations with the firm collapsed.

The National Union of Public Servants and Allied Workers union members also want a housing allowance, medical insurance and a guaranteed bonus.

South African social workers protest over health and safety

Over 70 social workers in Wolmaransstad in South Africa's North West province are working to rule in protest at overcrowded conditions.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union members complain that they are forced to work in just one room, unable to socially distance and with no confidentiality for their clients.

South Africa has recorded 719,714 coronavirus cases with 19,111 fatalities.

South African workers arrested in demonstration against water shortages

Eleven workers in Butterworth, Eastern Cape, South Africa were detained for questioning on October 21, after residents took to the streets and clashed with police in protests against local government handling of the water shortage.

Protests have been ongoing since August 2019, when residents organised a committee to force the water department to deal with the crisis. Taps regularly run dry, and weeks pass without water deliveries. A Committee member said, "Our problem is that they keep on promising us water but they are failing to deliver. We are tired of their empty promises. It's time to see action."

Nigerian health workers on strike for seven days

From October 21, health workers in Gombe State, Nigeria took seven days strike action to demand payment of the new minimum wage. The minimum wage was revoked by the state government after one month, using the pandemic as a pretext.

The unions involved—the Joint Health Sector Workers Unions and the Assembly of Health Professionals—imposed a delay of 21 days before starting the strike. Other demands include implementation of promised promotions and payment of arrears.

Nigeria is being rocked by protests against police brutality, fuelled by poverty, mass unemployment and inequality. Nigeria has 62,371 reported cases of COVID-19 and 1,139 reported deaths. As with other African countries, the number of tests is very low.

Ugandan teachers resist back-to-work order as COVID-19 infections spike

Teachers in Uganda are resisting the government order to return to work after seven months of closure due to the pandemic. The order comes as the infection rate is spiking for a second time.

The government claims its "Standard Operating Procedures" mean schools will be "safe." Filbert Baguma, General Secretary of the Uganda Teachers' Union spoke on TV in opposition, but limited this to a question of timing, Baguma said procedures had not reached schools in time for preparations to be made.

Uganda has 12,201 reported cases and 108 deaths.

Doctors in Kenya threaten strike over non-payment of salaries

Doctors in Migori County, Kenya are threatening to strike from October 26 after not receiving their salaries for September.

Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentist Board said the non-payment had led to "suffering and humiliation" for the doctors.

A week before, 3,000 workers in the county threatened to walk out over delays to their supplementary payments.

Liberian judicial workers blockade Chief Justice's convoy

In an ongoing dispute about unpaid salaries, over 100 Liberian judicial workers last week obstructed the parking area reserved for Chief Justice Francis S. Korkpor.

When Korkpor's convoy arrived, one protestor, Archie Ponpon, lay under the Chief Justice's car to prevent it leaving. Korkpor was forced to leave in an escort vehicle. The dispute centres on the non-payment of the Liberian dollar component of salaries for the last 12 months.

Judicial staff staged several protests over recent months. Ponpon said following a recent protest the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning had announced three months' payment by the end of October.

The Chief Justice earlier asked the protestors to set up a committee to work with Personnel Division of the Judiciary to investigate, but the protests continued. Nineteen workers were suspended and suffered death threats. Ponpon alleges some protestors were tortured in secret judiciary chambers and forced to make statements against their will.

Europe

Spanish doctors hold 24-hour strike

Doctors in Spain held a 24-hour national strike Tuesday, the first national strike by doctors for 25 years.

The State Confederation of Medical Unions members are demanding improved working conditions and recognition of their role as Spain is hit by a second wave of COVID-19 infections. Spain is seeing thousands of new cases and a rise in the numbers being admitted to hospital.

Around 50 of the strikers wearing white coats held a socially distanced protest outside the parliament building in Madrid. Many held posters depicting a big black boot about to stamp down on medical staff.

The government declared a state of emergency with the number of coronavirus reaching three million. An 11pm-6am curfew was announced, but schools and workplaces remain open.

Protest by Ukrainian workers in support of Belarus strikers

On Monday, Ukrainian workers protested near the Belarusian embassy in Kiev. The Confederation of Free Trade Unions members were showing solidarity with striking workers in Belarus. They called for an end to the persecution of trade unionists in Belarus.

Strike ballot threat by Irish public health doctors

The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) representing Irish public health doctors is threatening to ballot members for strike action unless the government agrees to implement a pay rise and give consultant status to the public health medics.

Public health doctors have been seeking consultant status since 2002. In 2019, a deal was struck to give the public health doctors consultant status and a pay rise in return for taking on extra duties. While doctors took on extra duties, the government reneged on the pay increase and consultant status. The IMO is in negotiations with the Irish government and will begin the strike ballot if agreement is not reached by November 30.

Strike at Italian white goods manufacturer

Italian workers held an eight-hour strike at the Whirlpool factory in Naples on October 22. Whirlpool manufactures washing machines and fridges.

It plans to close its Naples facility with the loss of 400 direct jobs and other jobs in the supply chain, by October 31. On October 23, FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIIL union members protested at various regions throughout Italy.

In 2018, Whirlpool signed an agreement with the Italian government promising to invest €250 million in a three-year plan to expand its operations. Italy was to be the base of operations for Whirlpool in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Belgian doctors and nurses protest

Around 20 doctors and nurses held a protest outside a Belgian medical facility on Monday. They wore just underwear and white coats. They were highlighting the lack of government support in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workers at care home in north London vote to strike

UK care and cleaning staff at the Sage care home in north London voted by a 100 percent majority to strike. The United Voices of the World Union members want a pay rate of £12 an hour, and sick pay and leave conditions in line with National Health Service staff.

UK telecom workers consultative ballot ends this week

The result of a consultative ballot of telecom workers at British Telecom (BT) was due Thursday. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) launched the ballot following BT's announcement in July of 200 redundancies in the BT Technology division, from October 31, under Phase 1 of BT's Transformation Programme.

On Wednesday, BT announced plans to cut further jobs in Phase 2 of the Transformation Programme. According to the CWU website around 100 of the proposed redundancies, "appear to involve CWU-represented grades." The posts marked for elimination are in IT, Dynamic Infrastructure and other sectors not included under the Phase 1 cuts.

The CWU has used consultative ballots to pressure BT into offering voluntary redundancies (VR) rather than fighting job cuts. The CWU organised a survey which, according to its website, "proved beyond doubt that sufficient numbers of willing leavers are prepared to take genuine VR packages to avoid the need for compulsion altogether."

Middle East

Strike by West Bank teachers

Palestinian teachers on the West Bank walked out Tuesday, in a dispute scheduled to last until November 12. The teachers are protesting the non-payment of wages over several months. Most schools in Ramallah city were closed as a result of the strike.

The West Bank is to halve the pay of its 130,000 state employees from Sunday as a result of financial strictures. As part of a dispute with Israel over annexations in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority is refusing revenues collected on its behalf by Israel.

Protest by retired Iranian oil workers

Retired oil workers gathered outside the Oil Ministry on Monday. They were protesting inadequate pension provision. Police were called against the protestors.

The Iranian government is facing a wave of strikes and protests over low wages and the non-payment of wages, most recently at the Parsian refinery in Lamerd. The refinery workers walked out over the same issue in August.



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